

November 26, 2014 CDC Ebola Response Update

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Announcer] Images of West Africans sick with Ebola broadcast on the evening news – combined with the diagnosis of the first US Ebola patient – gave rise to a single emotion in many Americans: fear. Dr. Barbara Reynolds, director of CDC’s Division of Public Affairs, explains it’s important to understand that fear exists for a reason – to help us survive – and it’s an emotion that must be acknowledged during a public health crisis.

[Dr. Reynolds] “Fear is helpful when it’s in moderation, when it helps people do the things that they need to do. Our communication should be directed at helping people manage their fear, not necessarily make their fear go away. “

[Announcer] Dr. Reynolds says the first public health messages about Ebola occurring in the United States encouraged Americans to use their fear of the virus to get educated. Decades of Ebola research has shown the chance the virus will spread in the US is extremely low – and the CDC consistently relayed that fact to the public.

[Dr. Reynolds] “It’s not transmitted by someone unless that person is sick, they can only make you sick if there’s an exchange of their body fluids when they are sick, and most importantly this is not an airborne virus. Even though we’re certain with that information, because it’s so new, some people aren’t yet very comfortable with that.”

[Announcer] That uncertainty surrounding Ebola created challenges for CDC’s communications team.

[Dr. Reynolds] “We know today with social media and information coming from so many different places at the same time that every fact you put out there is open to challenge. It’s also exciting because there’s that engagement between people and among different communities about the information that you’re sharing – but it’s also a big challenge when you have a little bit of time to tell people something that they may need to know to help them or their community.”

[Announcer] It’s important to acknowledge what people are feeling without judging them – Dr. Reynolds says. When a person believes you know what they are going through, then they will be receptive to your advice – which is critical during a public health crisis.

[Dr. Reynolds] “We want people to understand that we know Ebola is scary, we say that over and over again. It’s never fun to be afraid of something, but it’s worthwhile to know that that fear may be healthy, and there are actually things that you can do or your community can do to manage that fear.”

[Announcer] Fear can be a good thing when it helps us become educated on what we can do in the face of a crisis. That’s why CDC is communicating frequently about what we know, what we don’t know, and what we’re doing to help manage this crisis.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.